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# THE MUSICAL TIMES, And Singing Class Circular.

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## THE MUSIC OF THE CHURCH.

By HENRY C. LUNN.

Author of "*Musings of a Musician*."

THE employment of music in religious worship is so ancient that we feel almost inclined to believe that the first rude forms of thanksgiving and praise were uttered with voices raised in song. Homer, in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, often speaks of singing to the praise of the gods; and the ancient writings in many nations make frequent allusions to the use of music for the same purpose. The early history of the art is, however, so involved in obscurity, and is so inseparably mixed up with fable and conjecture, that we cannot but feel justified in arriving at the conclusion that, although we have no reliable account of the birth of music, it was in Egypt that it was nursed.

The estimation in which the art was held in a country which even now gives laws to geometricians and architects, may be found in the records of the time which have been handed down to us. Plato, for instance, has the following dialogue, which bears so much upon this subject that we cannot forbear quoting it.

"*Athen.*—'The plan which we have been laying down for the education of youth was known long ago to the Egyptians, viz.: that nothing but beautiful forms, and fine music, should be permitted to enter into the assemblies of young people. Having settled what those forms and that music should be, they exhibited them in their temples; nor was it allowable for painters, or other imitative artists, to innovate or invent any forms different from what were established; nor is it now lawful either in painting, statuary, or any of the branches of music, to make any alteration. Upon examining, therefore, you will find that the pictures and statues made ten thousand years ago, are, in no one particular, better or worse than what they are now.'

"*Clin.*—'What you say is wonderful.'

"*Athen.*—'Yes: it is in the true spirit of legislation and policy. Other things practised among that people may, perhaps, be blameable; but what they ordained about music is right; and it deserves consideration, that they were able to make laws about things of this kind, firmly establishing such melody as was fitted to rectify the perverseness of nature. This must have been the work of the Deity, or of some divine man; as, in fact, they say in Egypt that the music which has been so long preserved was composed by Isis, as was likewise the poetry.'"

Herodotus, also, speaking of the Egyptian festivals, ceremonies, and mediatory transactions

with the gods, says that, "at the annual festivities at Bubastis, where they assembled to worship Diana, men and women embarked in great numbers; and that during the voyage some of the women beat upon a tabor, while part of the men played on the pipe; the rest, of both sexes, singing and clapping their hands together at the same time. At every city that lies in their passage, they haul in the vessel, and some of the women continue their music."

To this we may add the testimony of Strabo, who says that "the children of the Egyptians were taught letters, the songs appointed by law, and a certain species of music established by government, exclusive of all others." Indeed, it may be concluded that music was not only earnestly cultivated by the Egyptians, but that the art was almost held sacred; for we afterwards learn that "as their mind became corrupted, they condemned it not only as unprofitable, but also as hurtful, because they were persuaded that it would enervate the vigour of men's minds, and therefore they made a law to forbid their children the learning of this science."

The Israelites used music almost exclusively in religious worship; and although it slumbered during their captivity, and rose and fell with their varied fortunes, their whole history reveals the estimation in which it was held; in proof of which, we find that when Herod established the Grecian games, in which music and dancing bore a conspicuous part, the people indignantly rejected them, as opposed to "the religion, laws, usages, and public opinions of their country."

That music occupied an important place in the religious rites of the Greeks and Romans, we have undoubted evidence; and although we hear more of the Roman musicians in the musical and poetical contests which were instituted in imitation of the Greeks, we find no religious ceremony complete without it. Dionysius says that "one of the branches of the religious institutions of Numa consisted of the *Salii*, twelve young men of the most graceful appearance, chosen from among the patricians, and whose office was to dance in procession, and sing hymns of praise to the god of war, beating time upon the *Ancilia*, or sacred shields." Again, in the laws of the twelve tables, among those relating to religious rites, we find the master of the funeral, in the games, "authorized to make use of three square mantles, to wear a purple fillet, and to be attended by ten players on the flute."

We have also the clearest proof that the primitive Christians used music as a powerful agent in the spread of their doctrines; and it is confidently affirmed that it had a material effect in producing conversion. Even at the nightly gatherings of the early Christians, before the law had sanctioned their worship, we see, by the following passage, that an organized musical service usually took place. "After supper," says Philo,

speaking of the Therapeutæ (who, Eusebius tells us, were Christians), "their sacred songs began. When all were arisen, they selected from the rest two choirs, one of men and one of women, in order to celebrate some festival; and from each of these a person of majestic form, and well skilled in music, was chosen to lead the band. They then chanted hymns in honour of God, composed in different measures and modulations, now singing together, and now answering each other by turns." There can be little doubt that these hymns, whatever they might be, were founded upon the music of the Jewish worship, which was itself largely based upon that of the pagan temples; and although we have every reason to suppose that at this time there did not exist the slightest knowledge of counterpoint, the correct measurement of time, or even of notation, the effect of their music was evidently such as to give a grand solemnity to their worship, which materially aided the progress of Christianity.

In the time of Constantine the Great, we find that a regular choir was appointed in the Church; and Eusebius tells us that at Milan, in the reign of Constantius, the son of Constantine, St. Ambrose first introduced the Chant, named after him the Ambrosian Chant. When we read of the wonderful effect of this composition—that unbelievers were brought to the true faith; and that, according to St. Augustine, the faithful found in it "a way of mutual consolation and exhortation, with a joint harmony of voices and hearts"—we are naturally desirous of knowing something of the succession of notes which could produce such results; but, unfortunately, no vestige of it has been handed down to us.

Until the time of Gregory the Great,—two centuries and a half after the time of St. Ambrose—we hear little of the progress of church music; but so much reform was effected by him, not only in composition, but in the general arrangement of the musical service, that his name marks a distinct epoch in the history of the art. We read that not only he collected the fragments of melodies formerly used in the Church, but that he composed, arranged, and constituted the *Antiphonarium*, and chants used in the morning and evening services: and ecclesiastical writers say that he was the first who separated the chanters from the regular clergy; observing that "singers were more to be admired on account of their voices than their precepts or piety." From him also we have the Gregorian Chant; and although it is doubtful whether he invented the square characters called Gregorian notes, they were certainly applied at an early period to his chants. He introduced also the *Canto fermo*, which was so called from its plain and grave character, as distinguished from the *Canto figurato*, which was in use before his time.

In spite of the powerful aids to religion, said to have been given by these early contributions

to the Music of the Church, we can scarcely imagine, with our modern notions of the art, how, with such simple means only at their command, such effects could have been obtained. Plain chanting, in the scales to which music was limited, constituted all the vocal portion of the Christian service at this time; and when we know that from the time of Gregory to that of Guido, the *authentic* and the *plagal* were the only distinctions of key, and that these chants were sung only in unisons and octaves, it is obvious that the monotony was unrelieved by even the faintest attempt at counterpoint or modulation.

The introduction of instrumental music into the Christian Church was scarcely recognised until the reign of Constantine. It is a doubt whether it was positively forbidden, but considering that the primitive Christians were driven by persecution into woods and caves, and that their congregational worship was conducted in defiance of the law, it seems improbable that time and opportunity could be found for the due cultivation of instrumental performance. The records of ancient times, however, fully support the belief that scarcely any religious ceremony was conducted by voices alone. A very early mention is made of instrumental music in Scripture, where Tubal, the sixth descendant of Cain, is called "the father of all such as handle the harp or organ." Six hundred years after the Deluge, we learn that in Syria it was customary to celebrate any important event "with mirth and with songs, with tabret and with harp." On the escape of the people of Israel across the Red Sea, we are told that a hymn of praise was sung, "in which Miriam, the prophetess, is represented as using a timbrel, followed by women with timbrels and dances." Again, we have the circumstance of David having been called in to administer relief to Saul afflicted with an evil spirit, "by the palliative powers of his harp;" and his being met when returning from his victory over Goliath, by the women of all the cities of Israel, "singing and dancing with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of music."

These extracts will sufficiently prove the conspicuous part usually borne by instrumental music in combination with voices; and we do not therefore believe that the first Christians had any desire to banish it from their worship, but that they contented themselves, as we have before remarked, with the simple voice of praise during the days of their persecution. Indeed, we find that no sooner had the Church been settled on a firm basis, than instrumental music re-appeared, as if it had always formed an integral portion of every recognised religious service.

Cautiously, however, were instruments at first admitted; and the tabrets and cymbals were expressly forbidden by the Fathers. Only the harp and psaltery were allowed; and anathemas were continually uttered against dancing in the

church; a practice which nevertheless prevailed for a long while, and gave the name *Choir* to that part of the church where the dances were performed, from the Greek word *Choros*, a company of dancers.

Although we have seen that voices and instruments were now firmly established in the service of the Christian Church, no record seems to show that there was the slightest approach to singing or playing in distinct parts: and, indeed, it was not until the organ was introduced that it seems at all probable such an idea was ever contemplated. That counterpoint grew up gradually there can be little doubt; and although tradition seems to point to Guido, in the eleventh century, as the inventor, we cannot but believe that some notion of rude harmony—suggested even by the harmonics given forth by what were falsely termed single sounds—must have existed before his time.

To Guido, however, a monk of Arezzo, in Tuscany, we are most certainly indebted for the invention of noting by points, and to the revision, if not entire abolition, of the barbarous succession of fourths or elevenths, called the *Organum*, which was sung under the *Cantus*, and often doubled, so as to appear also above the subject, as an uninterrupted succession of fifths. He also had the honour of rescuing the major third from the dissonances to which it had been condemned by the ancients, and giving it its true place amongst the concords. With regard to the five-line staff, it is certain that, if he did not originate it, he was the first to point out the feasibility of writing notes both on the lines and in the spaces, the importance of which reform he points out in the prologue to his *Antiphonarium*. After explaining the use of the lines and spaces, he says that “all the notes which are placed on the same line, or in the same space, denote the same sound: and that the name of the sound is determined either by the colour of the line or by a letter of the alphabet placed at the beginning of it; a rule of such consequence,” he adds, “that if a melody be written without a letter (that is a cleff) or coloured line, it will be like a well without a rope, in which, though there be plenty of water, it will be of no use.”

So much did this enlightened reformer effect for the progress of the Music of the Church, that we cannot take leave of him without an allusion to his invention of the *hexachord*, or scale of six notes, to which he gave the syllables Ut, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, being the first syllables of each hemistich of a hymn to St. John the Baptist.

Innovations crept in so gradually in these days, that although the B flat had already quietly taken its place between the A and B natural, even the daring of Guido could not imagine an equally stationary F sharp; and so timid indeed was he in his reforms, that although he really added a seventh sound to his *hexachord* (thus making it, in truth, no hexachord), he actually threw a slur upon his own invention by terming it “extra-

neous and irregular;” and in his own compositions he usually avoided using it.

We have dwelt at some length upon the history of Church Music up to the time of Guido, because we feel that the early struggles of an art to shake itself free from the trammels of pedantry and ignorance must always have the deepest interest to those who would wish to study its present state, with a view to its future.

The impetus given to Church music by Guido seemed to subside at his death; and although the monks are known to have diligently cultivated the art, it is obvious that few improvements of any importance could be made when the scales were carefully guarded, and *simple counterpoint*, or note against note, was all that could be written by the existing notation.

The invention of characters to represent Time enabled notes at once to exercise an independence which was of the utmost importance in composition; and being once liberated from the slavish restraint to which they had been so long bound, the dull unity of sound, which had prevailed for centuries, gave place to brilliant divisions; and, as many notes could now be written upon one syllable, counterpoint of course grew rapidly. The use of discords, too, was gradually admitted; so that, as Dr. Burney says, “by giving the ear a momentary uneasiness, and keeping it in suspense, its delight might be enhanced by the solution of the discordant difficulty.”

Of course it was not to be expected that such daring acts as these would be quietly permitted by those who conceived it their duty to act as guardians of this growing art, and to direct it into the right channel. Even the unpretending harmony of the *Canto fermo*, in the twelfth century, was said by John of Salisbury to “corrupt the mind by wanton modulations, effeminate inflexions, and frittered notes and periods, even in the *penetralia*, or awful sanctuary itself.” In 1322, Pope John XXII. issued a bull against the use of it, and spoke of those who upheld it as “men who, attending to the new notes and new measures of the disciples of the new school, would rather have their ears tickled with semi-breves and minims, and such-like frivolous inventions, than hear the ancient ecclesiastical chant.” Neither John of Salisbury, nor Pope John, however, appeared to have the power of arresting the natural development of the art; and could they have lived to have their ears “tickled” by crochets, quavers, and semiquavers, we tremble to think what would have been the result.

Music having been up to this period nursed almost exclusively by the Church, appeared now to wish for some life apart from its sacred home; and the secular strains of the Bards and Troubadours began to travel throughout Europe, carrying impassioned melody and verse into the homes of all who would listen, and reward the singers with clothes, horses, arms, or money.

It is scarcely to be wondered at that those who loved the primitive sacred music as a component part of their religion, should now be doubly watchful that it should not intrude itself into the Church with the slightest vestige of its new character; and thus, although many able treatises had been written on counterpoint, so jealous of musical progress were most of the ecclesiastical composers, that they were almost disposed to regard good counterpoint as rank blasphemy. The secular music, however, which may be said to have been mainly fostered by the travelling bards and troubadours, had little or no effect upon the solid music of the Church. Indeed, we have no reason to believe that any actual advance was made in the art by these itinerant lyrical poets; but as they performed the task of spreading a love for it outside the Church, there can be no question that, during the time in which they flourished, they shed at least a gleam of light upon the intellectual darkness with which they were surrounded.

(To be concluded in our next.)

#### ROYAL ENGLISH OPERA.

THE managers of this house seem resolved, this season, to bind themselves to no printed contract with the public; and have consequently opened their doors for their eighth, and farewell, session, with a simple announcement of the fact. That promises and performances seldom do agree at operatic establishments is now too well known to be questioned; and as a prospectus at the beginning of the season—like a Royal speech at the opening of Parliament—is a mere conventional piece of diplomacy, in which every pledge is carefully qualified, it becomes a great question whether this annual custom is at all worth preserving.

From the past seasons, however, we can fairly infer what we may expect from the present. Mr. Wallace and Mr. Balfe, who evidently represent the English school of composition in the eyes of the management, will be ready when wanted; and will, no doubt, divide the season between them—a few nights being devoted, as before, to foreign operas, translated into English. Respecting both Mr. Wallace and Mr. Balfe, as composers who have earned a right to admission in a house devoted to the productions of native talent, we cannot believe that their latter works entitle them to exclude all others from a fair trial. Since the *Bohemian Girl*, we should be puzzled to find an opera by Mr. Balfe that would even have been accepted, had it been judged solely on its musical merits before its production; and we doubt whether even Mr. Wallace would admit that he had in the slightest degree added to his reputation since his first opera, *Maritana*. These plain truths—often thought, but seldom spoken—lie at the root of the much-vexed English opera question; and proud as we should feel to welcome the dawn of a national school of music, we cannot permit our patriotism to blind us to the fact, that a series of such ephemeral works as have been supplied, to order, for the Royal English Opera, can only tend to deepen the feeling, either that no creative talent exists amongst our native composers, or that it cannot obtain a hearing.

Mr. Wallace's opera, the *Desert Flower*, inaugurated the present season on Monday, the 12th ult.; and if we may endorse the verdict of the house, achieved a decided success. The libretto is taken from an opera called *Jaguarita*, which was composed by Halévy, and produced in Paris in 1855. The English adaptation is the joint production of Messrs. A. Harris and T. J. Williams. The scene is laid near Surinam (Guiana); and the original

inhabitants, for the sake, we presume, of some desirable musical and dramatic effects, are supposed to have been North American Indians. The principal action of the opera takes place between the Dutch settlers and the "Anakowtas," a warlike Indian tribe, perpetually prowling about in the neighbourhood of a plantation, the property of *Eva* (Miss Susan Pyne), who seeks the protection of a troop of soldiers, commanded by *Major Hector Van Pumpernickle* (Mr. Henry Corri), whose cowardice, though made painfully apparent to the audience, appears to be mistaken for courage by all who are associated with him on the stage. *Captain Maurice* (Mr. Harrison), another officer in the Dutch service, gets mixed up with the fortunes of *Oanita*, the queen of the tribe (Miss Louisa Pyne), and is betrayed into the hands of the Indians by one of their chiefs, in the disguise of a trapper, named *Casgan* (Mr. W. H. Weiss). An impression having been made upon the heart of the Queen by *Maurice*, she consents to denounce herself as his betrayer, in the presence of the tribe, in order to save his life. In an interview with *Maurice*, she afterwards convinces him of her innocence, and offers herself as his bride. The marriage is, however, interrupted by the refusal of *Maurice* to renounce his religion; and he is condemned to the stake, for the insult offered to the gods of the Indians. He is, however, aided to escape by *Oanita*, who is about to be burned in his place, when the tribe becomes suddenly overpowered by the Dutch troops, and the lovers are made happy; the Indian villain, *Casgan*, being removed for that purpose by a ball from the musket of *Maurice*.

The strange incongruities in the musical colouring of this opera are so striking, as to detract very much from the merit of the work. The overture, commencing with an unison passage in the minor key, is unmistakably suggestive throughout of the wild Indian character; and, although apparently hastily thrown together, prepares the audience thoroughly for the very effective opening scene, representing a plantation, with all its surrounding characteristics. The war-dance, too, and most of the dramatic music in which the Indians are prominently brought forward, have much of the rude monotony which may, by courtesy, be allowed to belong to the country of the *Anakowtas*—but here all attempt at musical character ends. The opening air of the Indian Queen, *Oanita*, is a brilliant *bravura* Italian display; and as for the ballads, whether put into the mouths of Indians or Dutch, they are all cut to one pattern for the market. As mere songs, however, which might be taken out of this opera and placed in any other, many are extremely pleasing. The sentimental ballad of *Oanita*, "Why throbs this heart with rapture new," is certain to obtain that popularity in drawing-rooms which is too sure a sign of the source of its inspiration. The same may be said of Mr. Harrison's songs, "Though born in woods," and "My loved home I shall ne'er see more." The romance of *Casgan*, "The pangs of unrequited love," and the comic song for *Pumpernickle*, are also abstractedly to be commended,—the latter especially containing some very clever writing. Many excellent bits are sprinkled about in the concerted music; but there is such a general want of development of subject, that we feel condemned throughout the opera to perpetual disappointment. An exception, however, must be made in favour of the *finale* to the first act, in which there is a very skilful combination of some ball-room music in the dwelling-house of the plantation, with the choral effects of the soldiers and Indians outside.

Miss Louisa Pyne exerted herself to the utmost in the part of the Indian Queen; and sang, as she always does, with the grace and finish of an artist. Mr. Harrison managed his voice so adroitly as to give due effect to his ballads; which is indeed saying that he did all that was required of him. Unfortunately for Mr. Corri, he was expected to be funny; and that he laboured hard to be so we can fully attest. We should imagine that his notion of the part was to "shake in his boots;" and this idea was so fully carried out, that although the troops under his